

# **SOCIALIST STUDIES**

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# THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

## OBJECT

*The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.*

## DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

ALL ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO...

... Socialist Party of Great Britain,

... N12 8SB

## SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

If there is a social problem then a reasonable step would be to ask why it is occurring and how can it be resolved. Why, for examples, are people being made unemployed? Why cannot governments ensure full employment? Why can't food, clothing and housing simply be produced to meet human needs without the interference of markets, prices, buying and selling?

In trying to answer these questions workers are confronted with two political propositions. One proposition comes from social reformers who argue that if governments produced the right policy and enacted the correct piece of legislation there would be no periodic depression and so no mass unemployment.

An alternative proposition, advocated by Socialists, is for the working class to accept the failure of social reforms to run capitalism in the interests of all society. Instead workers should organise both consciously and politically to abolish production for profit and replace capitalism with production for social need. Social problems can only be resolved within the framework of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Socialism is the answer to the social problems currently facing the working class.

Social reforms to solve the problems facing the working class have demonstrably failed. All last century, and now in the first years of the 21st century, a series of reforms have been enacted to end economic depressions, unemployment and war. We still experience unemployment and war. The social reformers have been given long enough to find a solution within the framework of commodity production and exchange for profit and have been found wanting.



Social reforms fail because the defects of capitalism flow from the exploitative way the market system produces profit. Capitalists pay workers less wages and salaries than the wealth workers actually create. Capitalist production and exchange is anarchic and unplanned. No capitalist can ever know if he will find a buyer for his commodities. Employers can never know whether they will realise the surplus value exploited from workers during the productive process.

The object of capitalism is profit and the accumulation of capital. Capitalism is about competition and the destruction of competitors in the market. And capitalism is about the conflict between one nation state and another over raw resources, trade routes and strategic points of influence. While we still have nation states, private property ownership and labour markets there will always be war, poverty and unemployment. It is as simple as that. There can be no half measures. You either retain capitalism with all its social problems or you take steps politically to change society in a revolutionary way into a more effective, efficient and rational social system. In short, to replace capitalism with socialism.

A social system like capitalism is like a car or a building which is badly designed. With a building the rain comes in through the roof, it is cold in winter, there is damp, structural problems, subsidence and it is dangerous to live in. With the car it is full of rust, engine dead, tyres flat and suspension gone. No reasonable person should want to keep a building or car of this sort, and neither should any reasonable person want to keep a social system in place which is incapable of meeting the social needs of all society.

Socialists are trying to get workers to want to end social problems which means a better social framework has to be put in place first. Such a framework has to have the active support of a socialist majority otherwise it will not work. Socialism cannot be established blindly or by ignoring the need for political action. The decision to want to become a free association of people, voluntarily working together to meet human needs, has to be a conscious and political one.

The reason is straight forward. The resources of the world, transport, distribution and communication systems, and what is actually produced by workers are owned and controlled by a minority of the population. This ownership give them class power and class privilege. The majority of society is excluded from making fundamental decisions about what is to be produced, how and for whom.

The social power to determine the objective of production and distribution derives from the institution of private property ownership and its protection by capitalist politicians through the agency of the machinery of government. Government is the executive power of the capitalist class to determine its interests. Politicians and ministers of state actively pursue the interests of employers and not the working class, although they depend on workers for their support and legitimacy, particularly at elections. The police, the army, the judiciary, the prisons, the courts and the civil service all exist primarily to protect and further the profits and interests of the capitalist class. These political functions are controlled by parliament. It is through the control of parliament that political power - control over the machinery of government - is exercised.

To end the social power enjoyed by the capitalist class requires the working class to take over the political power which protects the ownership of the private means of production and distribution. This can only be achieved by the political power of a socialist majority exercising its political will through its socialist delegates controlling parliament.

Class is an ugly word. However it signifies an ugly and brutal social system in which life for millions of human beings is relatively short. And it is the class system which divides society into conflicting groups. For workers wanting to establish a socialist alternative to capitalism, class conflict and class struggle are unavoidable. Workers who want Socialism cannot avoid politics and the process of socialist revolution through a socialist party, with a socialist political programme and Socialism as its aim.

To identify a problem and pose a solution is not enough. How to attain the alternative and by what means is a crucial political question? If parliament is where political power resides then a socialist majority actively wanting and desiring socialism has to send socialist delegates there to capture political power.

Once political power has been secured, the system based on private property and production for profit can be transformed into one of common ownership and democratic control by all of society. With no national state boundaries and no competition, war will be impossible. With no labour markets and no employers there can be no unemployment. And without the wages system there can be no exploitation and poverty.

Since capitalism operates world-wide, so too does the class system. To end this just in one country is not possible. The struggle for Socialism must be an international struggle, just as the working class is an international class. Like Marx in the nineteenth century, we call on workers to unite to build a better world.

### On Christianity

*"Ridicule is quite a legitimate weapon. It is the weapon Voltaire used, and did more good with it than with any amount of serious argument. We think the Christian religion an immoral illusion, and we wish to use any argument to persuade the people that it is false. Ridicule appeals to the people we have to deal with, with much greater force than any amount of serious logical argument. The striking difference between this century and the last is, that free-thought is the privilege of the working class now. We want to make them disregard the mythical next world and live for this world, and insist on having what will make it pleasant to them" (Eleanor Marx to Beatrice Webb, MS Diary, May 24, 1883).*



## WORKERS, EUROS AND CAPITAL

The foundation of all economics is productive activity. Without this activity there could be no stock-exchange, no shares rising and falling, no interest rates or monetary relations of any kind, whether in any of the old currencies, or in new euros. And since prices, money, markets and buying and selling are the staple diet and the main source of capitalist economics it, too, has no purpose either without reference to them.

Men and women working to create and constantly recreate the goods and services that sustain human life and society, this is what is really fundamental.

The fact that capitalism turns wealth into commodities merely serves to demonstrate the divorce of the great majority of people - the working class from the historically developed means of production and natural resources.

The fact that commercial and finance institutions are but adjuncts to social production becomes obvious the moment production gets into difficulties and profits dictate that artificial restrictions must be imposed on production. Whether production be located on passenger aircraft, motor cars or the latest hi-tech cell-phones, the money markets and share prices react to what is happening in production.

Because the buying and selling of commodities is the way wealth production operates under capitalism the artificial is promoted to a position of supremacy. Money, because it becomes under capitalism the general equivalent of all things produced by social labour, also becomes the expression of the price of human labour-power, as employees sell themselves piece-meal on the labour markets.

Capitalism can produce multi-millionaires who become the standard bearers of success for the great majority, whose lives revolve around a monthly pay

cheque, but it cannot abolish poverty or enable commodity production to be used to meet unfulfilled needs.

When, as part of the trade cycle through which capitalism passes, a glut of commodities develops because of the anarchy of this system, the impression is reinforced that money holds the key to future recovery and renewed "*prosperity*" and is therefore the prime factor in human society. If this were so the inevitably recurring recessions and crises must show that monetary relationships are also the key factor in unemployment, poverty and homelessness. Commodity production guarantees poverty and crisis.

Because of the contradiction between private property and social production, men and women cannot simply produce and reproduce the means of living, they have to reproduce capital. Production has to make profits before reinvestment can take place. It is not that capitalism does not satisfy peoples' needs, it is that NEED has to be interpreted as effective demand - the ability to pay.

The satisfaction of needs is therefore not the purpose of driving force of capitalist production, the market economy cannot function for need alone. Without profits, capital accumulation is halted. Blind economic forces centred on exchange relationships dominate men and women and create conflicting interests and class warfare.

With the Federal Reserve Bank having cut interest rates eleven times during 2001 in a desperate effort to stimulate growth it is clear that the anarchy of the system dictates to the politicians and economists the limit of their policy choices. These absurdities peculiar to capitalism show a society choking on over-capacity while people suffer from want of life's simplest needs.

The fortunes of European capitalism in terms of booms and slumps and capital accumulation will now be expressed in Euros as also will be the profits of the capitalists and the wage slavery of the workers. Not much to get excited about!

Significantly, the president of the EU said of the introduction of the new currency that it is a "*political*" more than an economic move. This confirms our case that the economic power of one class over the another is, in the last resort, an expression of political power, and this political power is what ensures the continuance of the system of commodity production.



## WAGES AND THEIR ABOLITION

The average worker knows that money he receives in wages from their employer has to be paid out in living expenses both for themselves and their families. For the most part the money is spent on food, articles of clothing, rent or mortgage payments, fares, and other numerous items of household and personal expenditure. The standard of living of workers depends on the quantity and quality of the items they can afford to buy. If prices rise their living expenses will rise, and unless they are able to take steps to keep increasing their wages they will have to curtail their expenditure and suffer a reduction in their standard of living.

All this is so clearly obvious that most workers regard it as their natural condition in life, a condition to which they must adjust or sink into the abyss of the drop-out or the down-and-out. Workers live their lives for the purpose of serving capital, although they are often not aware of it. In a world of commodities their labour-power too is a commodity and is inseparable from their living selves. The capitalist buys labour-power, the worker sells it. Not only that, workers keep on selling it as long as there appears to be no alternative way of getting a livelihood. All workers dream of happier times, of perhaps coming into a fortune, of becoming a capitalist and leaving behind the tedium and drudgery of wage-slavery. This dream rarely comes true, and most workers know it. However bleak the immediate prospects, there is a bright future, a future which is well within the grasp of the working class and is theirs for the taking.

Over the thousands of years men and women have spent in civilised society they have developed and perfected tremendous productive forces which can produce all the wealth that society requires. When we discuss productive forces we are not just referring to machinery and applied technology. The working class is the greatest productive force of all. This social organization carries in its brain the accumulated knowledge born of centuries of experience

of humankind's struggle against nature in the act of production. How to grow crops, how to breed animals, how to build, construct, educate, and investigate; how to divide its productive activity by the organization of the social division of labour.

Human beings have created a new environment. They have extended their senses by the creation of the machine and information age, an age which seems to threaten the very existence of millions of its creators by removing them from the productive process through unemployment.

To the average working person the social powers of production appear to be beyond their comprehension. In their mind they represent forces which are almost supernatural. To begin with, they are owned by the capitalists and the worker has no access to these forces except on the conditions dictated by capital, which means that workers produce not for themselves but for their employers.

If workers looked at their class interests they would see that the means of production and distribution were developed by the working class, continually improved by the working class, and they only function because workers alone perform the useful labour without which society could not survive. When the workers think subjectively, they look for an escape-pattern or for some cushioning factor which will alleviate or help them adjust to life under capitalism. In the first place they will look for solutions in wage increases, and then in social reform. Both of these are dead ends. However much it may be argued that increases in wages are in the interests of the working class, it is quite clear that the energy, time and effort spent in achieving wage increases have to be continually expended. This is the vicious circle out of which the Socialist seeks to break. We advocate the abolition of the wages system. We do this because the social relation of wage labour and capital restricts the productive process, because productive activity is limited to the needs of the market, and the marketing of goods must be profitable to those who own and

control the means of production and distribution. Above all, we want to end the wages system since production for profit can never be in the interests of the working class.

The abolition of the wages system could only be accomplished if the means of production and distribution were taken away from their present owners. We need to remove the social capital from the ownership and control of the capitalist class and make it social property. There is no reason why this cannot be done and there is also no reason why production cannot take place with the sole object of fulfilling people's social and individual needs.

It is not what the capitalists want that matters. Obviously they would want things to remain as they are. It's what the working class wants that matters. The world is theirs for the taking. All that is necessary is a change of mind on their part. If workers stopped supporting capitalist candidates at elections, became socialists and sent their own Socialist delegates to parliament with a clear mandate to abolish capitalism and replace it with Socialism they would achieve a peaceful revolution for Socialism.

#### **Capitalist economics: A ruling class joke**

1. Chancellor of the Exchequer: *"Over at the treasury we employ a dozen economists and a dice. The economists advise us what to do and then we throw the dice to decide which economist's advice to follow".*

2. Economist: *"Unfortunately, the evidence didn't support my theory, so I had to change it",*

Scientist: *"You changed the theory?"*

Economist: *"No, of course not, I changed the evidence".*



### "UNIMPORTANT CONVENTICLES"?

In historical circles Professor Hobsbawm is highly regarded. "*Hobsbawm is a master historian and his version of events is thrilling*" gushed the journalist Bryan Appleyard in **The Independent**. "*Multi-lingual erudition*", gasped Ben Pimlott in **The Independent on Sunday**. Hobsbawm is feted by the media for his learned papers on working class history and is held up as an intellectual model for students of history to follow.

Hobsbawm was also a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). And through his politics he consigned the Socialist Party of Great Britain into the dustbin of history. In his book: "*Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*" (1964), Hobsbawm published a paper "*Hyndman and the SDF*", a review of C Tsuzuki's book: "*H M Hyndman and British Socialism*". In his paper, Hobsbawm dismissed the SPGB as " ... wholly unimportant conventicles" (p 231), claiming that the Party had broken away from the SDF in "1906" to become an insignificant sect.

In his review of 1964, Hobsbawm conveniently forgot to tell his readers that the SPGB was still in existence and was politically opposing the British Communist Party by demonstrating that Russia was neither "*Marxist*" nor "*Socialist*" and that the political organisation Hobsbawm belonged to was a fraud. For those historians who supported Russia the first casualty in their historical writing was the truth. In the case of the working class, the disreputable task for these academic hacks was to show that the class struggle in Britain between workers and capitalists, from the 18th century onwards, led inevitably to the formation of the Communist Party in 1920.

Now, Professor Hobsbawm is supposed to be a historian with a particular *penchant* for working class history. We assume he must have read the texts produced by the SPGB to make some form of assessment of the Party but none are cited in the bibliography of **Labouring Men**. If, for example, he had

bothered to look at the SPGB's pamphlet "**The Communist Manifesto and the last hundred years**" published in 1948, Hobsbawm would have known that the Party was founded in 1904 and not in 1906. Dates are supposed to be important to historians.

Hobsbawm would have also learnt from the SPGB pamphlet the political reasons why founder members of the Party were compelled to set up a principled Socialist Party with Socialism as its only object. The pamphlet, for example, states that:

*"The Social Democratic Federation, while violently attacking its contemporaries for their reformist policies, at the same time supported similar reforms, strove for unity with them, and engaged in political action by arrangements alternately with the Liberal and Conservative parties. Inside this party a group, which had spent years actively engaging in an attempt to convert it into a really revolutionary organisation, at last had to give up the attempt in despair and leave the organisation to form something that would really accomplish the end its members aimed at"* (p28).

History, as Orwell reminded us, is largely to do with politics, those who write the history books and those who do not. And Hobsbawm's contribution to a capitalist historiography was to write the SPGB out of history by ridiculing the Party as a sect of little consequence. At least an earlier historian, M Beer, for all his faults, had praised the SPGB for their "*perseverance and self-sacrifice ... disseminating Marx's views on economics and political class warfare*" (**A History of British Socialism** 1919, p269). Beer was associated at the time with the SDF.

The learned professor did not tell his readers why the SPGB was formed and why it survived the SDF. Throughout his career as a historian not once do we

find Hobsbawm engaging with the Party either as a scholar or as an inquisitive historian. He knew of our existence but deliberately chose not to share this knowledge with his students and readers.

This blind spot continues to this day. In a recent book "**The Age of Extremes**" (1994), Hobsbawm omits any reference to the SPGB and its historical criticism of Russia from a Marxist perspective. He does not tell his readers why the SPGB survived both state capitalism and the mis-named Communist Party to which he belonged before he decamped to London's club land after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In his book Hobsbawm devotes a whole chapter to the demise of "*real socialism*", writing that:

*"... the failure of a revolution elsewhere left the USSR committed to build Socialism alone, in a country in which by the universal consensus of Marxists in 1917, including the Russian ones, the conditions for doing so were simply not present" (p497).*

Not so. There was no "*real Socialism*" in Russia from 1917 onwards. Russia was committed to building capitalism not Socialism. Lenin admitted as much even before his New Economic Policy. In 1917 the Russian working class were in a minority, socialist consciousness was weak both in Russian and elsewhere, Socialism could not be imposed by leaders no matter how well meaning. The low level of development in the productive forces in Russia means that Socialism was not a practical proposition. Russia existed within a global capitalist system which meant that "*Socialism within one country*" was impossible and that the global economy would exert pressures on Russia to conform to the priorities of the world market.

Contrary to Professor Hobsbawm's assertions few of those who he considered "*Marxists*" claimed that the conditions for Socialism in Russia were not



present. **The Socialist Standard**, from 1918 onwards, was full of letters from supporters of Russia claiming the country was "*Socialist*" and carried frequent letters from those who were aggrieved at the SPGB describing it as capitalist. Visitors to Russia came back to Britain claiming that they "*had seen the future*". From its formation in 1920 the Communist Party of Great Britain certainly believed Russia to be Socialist. In the 1960's, Hobsbawm and intellectuals throughout the world were of this view too. It was only the real Marxism of the SPGB which showed otherwise but, at that time, Hobsbawm and other Left-wing academics within the universities were making sure students did not come across the Party.

When academics were forced to mention the SPGB they either misrepresented the Party like G D H Cole with his misleading assertion that "*SPGB leaders urged their supporters not to vote*" ("*A History of Socialist Thought*", vol iii, pt 1, 1956, p 190) or ridiculed the Party with political invective. Left-wing and mainstream historians still pursue this disreputable practice today. The historian, Tania Rose, does not mention the SPGB once in her book "*Aspects of Political Censorship 1914-1918*" (University of Hull 1995) and refuses to engage with us in debate of why she omitted any reference to the Party in her discussion of political opposition to the First World War. When criticized by the SPGB for his support of the War in Afghanistan, **The Independent** journalist, David Aaronovitch, writes us off as a "*sect*". He may have left the Communist Party a long time ago but he took with him their book of political abuse from which Hobsbawm draws on his own invective against the SPGB.

Hobsbawm also spins out the myth that Europe in 1917 was "*revolutionary*". The First World War, in which millions of workers killed each other for the interests of another class, showed that there was no "*failure of a revolution elsewhere*". The uprisings in Germany (the Spartacist revolt in Berlin of January 1919) and Hungary (the Soviet led by Bela Kun in March 1919) were not Socialist revolutions but reactions to the war. They failed precisely because they were not Socialist. Socialism cannot be established through street

confrontation with troops. Instead the failure of this futile direct action demonstrated that the working class had not sufficiently developed to the point necessary to reject capitalism and organise for Socialism. As the SPGB argued at the time, someone who had just fought for "*king and country*" is not in the frame of mind to become a Socialist.

What of real working class history and its documentation? If Professor Hobsbawm had consulted the SPGB pamphlet "*Russia since 1917*" he would have come across an article "*The Revolution in Russia; where it fails*", published in the **Socialist Standard** of August 1918. In the article the Party wrote of Russia:

*Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling proprietors of the South, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage-slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life?*

*Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has every recorded, the answer is "No!"* p 14.

This is a major Marxian insight into events in Russia, an application of the materialist conception of history. You will not find this important text cited in any of Hobsbawm's works on working class history. Few history students at universities have had their attention drawn to this remarkable document, partly through the ignorance of historians who should know better and partly due to the political machinations of opponents, past and present, who dominate the history departments of the world with the political brief of pretending the SPGB did not exist or were "*unimportant conventicles*".

## THE SOCIALIST POSITION ON REFORMS

Opponents of the SPGB have made an artificial distinction between reforms and reformism, and claim this distinction has always been made by the Party. How can this be so? This would mean the acceptance of capitalism and its improvement by social reforms. Reformism on the other hand, again according to our opponents, is the introduction and implementation of legislative measures by the state. This is a distinction without a difference.

Two questions need answering. First, are we to accept that the Party is opposed to reformism and not reforms? Is the Party opposed to workers accepting capitalism and voting for reforms which they consider to be in their interests, but at the same time not opposed to workers voting for reforms and supporting capitalist parties in order to obtain them? We emphatically say no. This is an untenable position and one we do not hold nor ever have held.

Second, has the Party ever committed itself to voting for certain reform measures under certain circumstances? We have been given the example of the position of a minority of Socialist MPs in parliament. We are told that they would vote for certain measures judged by the Party to be in the interests of the working class. This is not correct. To begin with, the Party has never supported or committed itself to supporting any particular reform. Furthermore, the position of the Socialist MPs is that any measure will be judged in the light of the advancement of our object, even if this means voting against measures which are in the interests of the working class. Were we to accept that the criteria for judging reforms was to be the furthering of the interests of the working class there would be no logical reason for waiting until such times as we managed to return Socialist MPs before entering into reformist activity. We could do it now.



Our opponent also makes the point that we are not opposed to reforms on principle, although we do not advocate them. As long as the **Declaration of Principles** remains the sheet anchor of the SPGB we are opposed to reformist activity, as reformist activity cannot be separated from the capitalist political parties which advocate and implement reform policies. We are hostile to them and all they stand for on the ground of Socialist principle. If we support reforms we must advocate them.

If we oppose reforms we must still advocate opposition to them. There is no middle ground. To advocate means to speak in favour of or plead another's cause. Wishing workers every success in pursuing reformist policies like the Prague Spring or Solidarity and supporting non-socialist political parties to obtain democratic reforms is in conflict with the Declaration of Principles.

What our opponents have not understood is that all aspects of social life, including reforms and Trade Unions, are liable to analysis by the Party. Our propaganda is a reflection of this analysis. However, we are in the political field advocating a political solution to all the social problems - which is Socialism. Our analysis is, therefore, solely and exclusively for the purpose of our objective, not whether a particular measure is or is not in the interests of the working class. We are not called upon to pronounce our curse or give our blessing according to the merits of each case. Our responsibility is to Socialism. We should not compromise our position by jumping on and off the reformist bandwagon.

What about Trade Union action? What about the action by Trade Unions to increase wages and shorten hours with political reformist activity? Does the SPGB endorse this action? We do not. The Party stands for the abolition of the wages system not for its continuation under some reformed scheme of social legislation, or Trade Union reform. Trade Unions are a fact of social life, and are born out of the conditions of class struggle. Used in a proper way they can and do prevent wages from falling and hours of work rising. The

Party recognises this. Trade Union activity takes place on the economic field and is an aspect of the class struggle. There can be no conflict between the Party and Trade Unions so long as the latter confine their activities to the economic field and use their organisations to fight the employers. We cannot take part in Trade Union struggles, nor do we have any contingent liability to support Trade Unions on the political field where they support sectional reformist interests. Then they are in the same category as other reformist groups.

The struggle between labour and capital is a class struggle between employers and employed. The struggle for reforms is not a class struggle, and history has shown it can and does take place between capitalist parties in order to gain working class support.

Social reforms cannot be separated from non-socialist political action. We cannot give moral support to reforms because we are a political party - to do so would be hypocritical and worthless. We cannot take a complete inventory of all social problems and reform solutions and spend time and energy separating the good from the bad. The welfare of the working class can only be served by propaganda which aims at its abolition. That is our single purpose, and we would detract from this were we to support or oppose reforms.

#### **The relationship between Economics, Politics and War**

*"Business follows the flag. When there is stability and security there is likely to be investment"*, US Defence Secretary: **William Cohen** defending US foreign policy.

## HARD TIMES

Blues music reflects hard times. One poignant piece of blues music is "Silicosis is killin' me", recorded in 1936 by Josh White under the pseudonym of "Pinewood Tom". The singer reports his occupation - *tunnel digger*, his condition - "*silicosis ate my lungs away*", and his fate - "*death*".

According to the musicologist, Archie Green, we are not told where or when this job took place. But he gives us this clue:

*"Only the industrial health specialist now recalls the drilling (1930-33) of the three mile tunnel 'Hawks Nest' at the confluence of the New and Kanawha Rivers in West Virginia. When labourers encountered a stratum of near pure silica, many were doomed to death by silicosis (nodules of scar tissue build in the lungs to cover fine particles of quartz dust). Nearly 500 tunnel men died during and after the job. Few of the families were compensated either by the prime construction contractor or by Electromet, a Union Carbide and Carbon subsidiary which used the tunnel's water-generated power" (Hard Times, Blues Anthology 1984).*

Union Carbide. Now there is a name to remember. In Bhopal, India in 1984, an explosion and subsequent poison gas leak from Union Carbide's chemical factory killed more than 2,500, and blinded and injured thousands more. A **New York Times** investigation concluded that the disaster was a direct result of cost-cutting measures by Union Carbide. Profit before people.

And capitalism is all about profit making. Factory reforms litter the statute books but the killing goes on and on. Capitalism is, after all, about risk taking. "*Remember, ... business is always a bet*", said Keynes to the financier, Nicholas Davenport (**Keynes**, Robert Skidelsky, 1996).



However, it also means gambling with people's lives. For many workers the consequence of commodity production and exchange is injury, sometime death. Capitalism kills. The profit motive kills. *"With adequate profit, capital is very bold"*, wrote T. J. Dunning. *"A certain 10% will ensure its employment anywhere; 20% certain will produce eagerness; 50%, positive audacity; 100% will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300%, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit it will freely encourage both ..."* (quoted in **Capital** vol I, Chap. XXXI).

And so back to silicosis. Silicosis is a lung fibrosis caused by the inhalation of dust containing silica. Apart from miners, other workers have met premature deaths due to this disease, including quarrymen, tunnel workers and masons working sandstone, granite, slate or flint.

The consequences of working with silica are matched by another material, asbestos: a commodity which has caused the death of literally hundreds of thousands of workers worldwide. Asbestos dust produces a disease - asbestosis - which is very similar to silicosis in its effects on lungs and health.

The first known asbestos-related death was in Rochdale, England, in 1900. The death had been brought to the attention of the government by the factory inspectorate but they chose to do nothing about the problem. Profit before people. In 1930 it was known that 25% of the workforce employed by Merewether and Price had asbestosis. Little or nothing was done. The deaths continued. Profit before people. By the end of the 1930's the dangers of working with asbestos were understood to be killing thousands of workers. Again, nothing was done. Profit before people.

In the sixties, the futility of state reforms was highlighted when a south London company was prosecuted for its reckless use of asbestos. A relatively small fine was imposed on the company which very soon after closed its plant. The

south London workforce was laid off. The company simply carried on, shipping its machinery out to South Africa. There, under the apartheid regime, African workers could be exploited and exposed to asbestosis without any of that *"health and safety"* nonsense. Ironically, in 1977 Turner Brothers were advertising asbestos on the London Underground under the catchy heading *"It's a life protector"*. It was not until 1999 that all asbestos was finally prohibited except in certain specific cases like the brake linings of lorries.

Why? Why the decades of illness and death? Profit is the answer. It was either too expensive to use alternative products in fire and weather protection or to re-organise production processes so that these products would not be needed. It was not until the government carried out a cost benefit analysis rating the value of each dead worker from asbestosis at £1m that the law was changed to enforce stricter controls to protect those workers working near asbestos components.

We should not be fooled into believing that cost benefit analysis is a philanthropic piece of economic theory. Far from it. The Ford Pinto car of the early 1970's, for example, had a little problem. The car's fuel tank could burst into flames when hit from the rear. Ford engineers calculated that the problem could be corrected at an additional cost of \$11 a car. Too much for the profit-hungry directors and shareholders. Cost benefit analysis showed that it would be cheaper to pay out \$200,000 for each of the '180 anticipated deaths (Apostles of Greed, Allan Engler, p 81).

The cost to the capitalist State of ill and dead workers now outweighs the cost of finding and removing asbestos. However, the health and safety reforms were not enacted for the benefit of workers. Capitalism is not a philanthropic social system. The recent spate of asbestos legislation was a house-keeping exercise within the capitalist class. The cost of health care to the NHS, state benefits for widows and so on are paid through taxation from the capitalist class as a whole. One of the conflicts within the capitalist class is to spread the

burden of taxation from one section to the next. Paying for the consequences of asbestos was now spread on to those capitalists that had asbestos in their buildings and were likely to place workers at risk when maintenance or building work was to occur.

Yet, for a whole century workers died miserable deaths from coming into contact with asbestos, a period which had Liberal, Conservative and Labour governments. If socialism had been established at the beginning of the 20th century with common ownership and democratic control over the means of production and distribution by all of society these unnecessary deaths would not have occurred. Unlike capitalism, Socialism will produce goods and services solely to meet human needs, one of those fundamental needs being adequate health care in production and safety in working conditions.

Capitalism made huge profits throughout the 20th century from the misery, exploitation and premature death of the working class who came into contact with asbestos. Entire families would eventually die because the father came home with asbestos dust in his hair or on his clothes which would be inhaled by the rest of the family. Recently a woman died from a disease cause by inhaling asbestos dust while hand washing her husband's work clothes (*Times*, 1 December 2000). Today, and for the foreseeable future, the consequence of production for profit will mean that six thousand workers in Britain are going to die by the year 2030 of asbestos-related diseases. As another blues singer, Barbecue Bob, was to sing "*We sure got hard times*".

### **Letters to Socialist Studies.**

We are pleased to receive and to reply to letters. However, we do not have much space so please keep your contribution to a maximum of 500 words. Publication Committee.



## THE CAPTIVE MIND

### The Corporate State

According to the front cover of George Monbiot's "**Captive State: the Corporate Takeover of Britain**" (Penguin 2001), the book is considered "*The most explosive political account of the new decade*". Unfortunately, it is more of a damp squib.

Monbiot's argument is that corporations have become so powerful they now threaten the foundations of "*democratic government*" because "*the British government has effectively collaborated in its own redundancy by ceding power to international bodies controlled by corporations*". Monbiot offers as analysis:

*"Corporations, the contraptions we invented to serve us, are overthrowing us. They are seizing powers previously invested in government, and using them to distort public life to suit their own ends"* (p 4).

But when have capitalist corporations ever been set up to serve the need of all of society? Capitalist corporations exist to make a profit. As Monbiot himself admits "*directors have a 'fiduciary duty' towards the shareholders; they must place their concerns above all others*" (p 13). Capitalism is all about putting profit before people.

Monbiot cites numerous examples, from hospitals to schools and universities, of the way in which the private sector is now playing a greater role in the operation of the State through advertising, sponsorship, private finance initiatives and the out-sourcing of services. However, he forgets that the primary aim of capitalism is commodity production and exchange for profit. Schools are about providing future workers for the labour market. The NHS exists to get unwell workers back to their place of exploitation as cheaply as

possible and to ensure the health care necessary to reproduce the working class from one generation to the next.

Furthermore, the cost of the State is paid for by the capitalist class. Since taxation comes from profits, government policy must be to keep the cost of the State to the barest minimum. Cuts have always been a feature of the so-called "Welfare State" and the introduction of private companies into the various areas of State provision is seen by politicians as one means to reduce the burden of government spending and risk. Of course nothing goes to plan. The Labour government part-privatised the National Air Traffic Services who immediately cut 20% of support and managerial staff. The company relies on fees from airlines using UK airspace and has been severely affected by the slump in the industry. The government cannot let the company go bankrupt and so have to underpin the NATS by the very money it hoped to save.

The State is not a socialist institution nor is it a philanthropic body. Nor does the State have a duty towards all members of the public. The government is not a neutral umpire in a cricket match played by gentlemen of equal social standing. The State exists to conserve the monopoly and power of the capitalist class and to serve its interests. As Marx and Engels noted in the **Communist Manifesto** "*The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie*".

In its executive role the government has no choice but to side with the capitalist class in the class struggle against workers over the intensity and extent of exploitation and the defence of private property ownership. Governments have often come up against workers in strikes and used force and imprisonment to put them down. The history books are littered with anti-working class legislation. When in power all governments lecture the working class against taking pay rises. In some cases, usually when Labour is in power, governments have tried to impose pay restraint policies. Governments seldom, if ever, lecture capitalists on making too much profit.

### Private-Public Partnerships

Throughout the book Monbiot believes there is something superior in the provision of State services compared with those found in the private sector. He forgets that it is in the private sector that the capitalist class enjoy their privileged consumption from the womb to the tomb. Capitalists send their children to the best schools. There is private health care, private insurance, private leisure - the best that unearned income can buy. Much of what constitutes the State infrastructure has always been provided by the private sector; from missiles to the vast amounts of paper used up by the bureaucracy.

The argument pursued by Monbiot is similar to the one pursued by the capitalist Left in the 20th century who supported nationalisation and the nationalised industries in the misguided belief that they represented something superior to private capitalism. Socialists showed then, as we argue now, that the State control of industry or the State provision of services to the working class are not Socialist policies because the wages system, an enforced form of rationing, is still left intact. Furthermore, the nationalised industries did not resolve the class struggle or run capitalism in the interest of all society just as the State today is unable to provide workers with the education and health they and their families need.

The private-public debate over education and health has nothing to do with the interests of the working class and everything about bringing the cost of the capitalist State down.

In the heyday of British capitalism when, it was said, Britain was "*the workshop of the world*", profits were high, and in the period 1860-1875 they increased enormously. Because the cost of the government was very low the capitalists retained almost all of their income and were able to accumulate vast fortunes.



In 1880 for example budget expenditure represented only 8% of National Income (GNP). In 1980 it was 46%, in 1989 the total managed expenditure had been reduced to 39% and today it has fallen to 37.9% (**Blue Book**, Office of National Statistics, 2001).

Taxation in 1880 was consequently low. There was no Income Tax (PAYE) on workers' wages and the amount of income tax paid by a very rich person (ie someone with an income corresponding to £800,000 in 2001) was only about 2%. Now it is 40% (the standard rate is 20%). To see how the British capitalist class has fared over the last 25 years we have government statistics provided for us in **Social Trends**. In 1976, when Labour was in power, the marketable wealth owned by the wealthiest 1% was 21%. In 1991, under John Major, it had fallen to 17%, while under Tony Blair it has risen again to 23%. This should dispel the myth that Labour represents the interests of the working class.

In 1880 there was no corporation tax on company profits. In 1990 the standard rate was 35%, with lower rates for smaller companies. In 2001 it was 31% (**Inland Revenue**, 2000).

In 1880 there was a somewhat complicated "*death duty*" but it was nothing like as high as the present 40%. Inheritance Tax is payable on the amount of an estate above £242,000.

The cost of government has increased because governments have taken on additional functions, in particular what are known as "*social services*". Collectively, in 1900, the social services cost about 2.5% of total national income. Their cost increased to 4.5% in 1910, 6.4% in 1920, and 10% in 1938 and, in 1945, with the Beveridge reforms after World War II, the cost rose to 15.5%. The cost in 1995 was 12% of national income (P Lilley, **Winning the Welfare Debate**, Social Market Foundation, p 13, 1995). Social security expenditure in 1950 was £598 million, by 1998 it had risen to £93,408 million,

and despite rising inflation during this period, the figures show a significant rise on previous years. And this figure is likely to increase further with the growing proportion of the population living longer (Statbase 2001).

Because of the dismantling of the British Empire, defence which used to be a considerable item of cost borne by the government has declined as a proportion of national income. In 1900 defence cost more than double the cost of social services. By 1910 social service costs had already exceeded defence, and in 1990 this was more than three times as much. In 1988 for the first time the Health Service alone cost more than defence.

The additional functions taken on by the government have led to an increase in the number of civil servants from about 50,000 a hundred years ago to 565,000 in 1990. This figure was reduced to 478,500 in 2001 as part of the attempt by both Conservative and Labour governments to keep the cost of the State down (Cabinet Office Statistics 2001).

Today, the primary issue which faces governments is how to make British capitalism more competitive on the world market. Monbiot does not consider these factors nor the pressures imposed on British capitalism from competitors abroad. Capitalism is not a charity.

### **Labour: just another capitalist Party**

Some of Monbiot's most trenchant criticisms are directed against the Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair. He notes that the 1999 Labour conference's fringe meeting on "*Social Justice in a Global Economy*" was sponsored by the Swiss company ABB:

*"Abb built the turbines for the Three Gorges Dam in China which is displacing over one million people from the land"* (pp 3-4).

But surely this is what we expect from the Labour Party? They are a capitalist political organisation serving the needs of the British capitalist class. As Monbiot reminds us a little later on (p 7), Labour wants to be "*the party of business*" (Peter Mandelson, Secretary for Trade and Industry, 2 November 1998, **speech to the Confederation of British Industry's annual conference**), which aims at the "*forging of links with the business community*" - (Tony Blair, 11 November 1997, **speech to the Confederation of British Industry's annual conference**) and wants a society "*that celebrates and values its business heroes as much as it does pop stars and footballers*" - (Peter Mandelson at the 1998 CBI conference).

Monbiot then states that "*Captive State details the institutional corruption of a nation which has so long enjoyed a reputation for integrity*" (p 5). Has it? Sleaze, corruption and opportunism have always accompanied capitalism as it passes from one economic crisis to the next. We only have to recall Robert Walpole's corrupt government of the 18th century and then trace a line of nepotism, bribery, placements, patronage and embezzlement right down to our own age to show that this is demonstrably not true. The creation of local authorities at the end of the 19th century was fast followed by several anti-corruption Acts of Parliament (Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889-1916). Capitalist relations have always brought the worst out in people and have kept the novelists, priests, moralists, satirists and jailers in continuous employment over the past two hundred years.

Despite being a columnist for **The Guardian**, an Honorary Professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Keele, and visiting Professor at the Department of Environmental Science, University of East London, Monbiot's grasp of politics is as poor as convicted Saudi thieves trying to field in the slips at a cricket match. Here we have the following gem:

*"The Labour Party ... like left-of-centre parties all over the world, was presented with a brutal choice. It could continue to oppose the massively*



*increased forces of corporate Britain, with the result that it would face a hard and painful struggle to be elected, and the possibility, if it failed, of the final disappearance of the party. Or it could bend to the power of business, promising that it would deliver not only what the corporations wanted, but also, in the absence of an official anti-corporate opposition, a pliant parliament and a discouraged electorate" (p 10).*

Has Mr Monbiot been living on another planet? If he left the heady offices of **The Guardian** and the even headier heights of a university philosophy department for the real world in which the rest of us live he would have noticed that throughout its history the Labour Party has always bent towards the power of business. Labour has always accepted class ownership of the means of production, and has proved willing and able to do whatever the interests of British capitalism demand. Parasitical on Liberal intellectuals like the Webbs, Beveridge and Keynes for its ideas, when the capitalist class have said "jump" Labour politicians have always asked "how high"?

In one interesting passage, Monbiot slips in this line "*In Britain, small business in some sectors appears to be threatened with extinction*" (p 15). Since he nowhere acknowledges the existence of a working class we see where Monbiot's real class support lies, with a section of the capitalist class who find it difficult to compete with large capitalist businesses. Monbiot wants a smaller scale capitalism; a Utopian vision of the past. He wants an "acceptable" capitalism with the State as a benign umpire balancing all competing interests. He wants the impossible: capitalism without the effects of capitalism. In this he has gone no further than Proudon.

"*Small Business good: Large Business bad*" is Monbiot's dictum, one shared, no doubt, by most provincial businessmen in their local Conservative Clubs. A section of the so-called "anti-capitalist" movement are made up of those who run small businesses and feel threatened by larger competitors or want their businesses protected from foreign competition. In political or social reform

movements there are often some strange bed-fellows. Socialists have continually warned workers to have nothing to do with these movements, democratic or otherwise.

### **Perpetual reforms or Socialism?**

What is Mr Monbiot's Utopian solution to the corporate takeover of Britain? Predictably and unimaginatively it is a list of social reforms. Here they are in descending order:

- \* Global trade agreements which set minimum standings,
- \* Multinationals must conform to international rules,
- \* Multinationals must be subject to human rights laws,
- \* Global taxation measures,
- \* World-wide cap on executive pay,
- \* Democratize international decision making (pp 355-366).

Not much to worry the capitalist class. Even if they were all enacted the capitalist class would still enjoy a privileged and powerful existence. The reforms would do nothing for the class position of the workers.

But according to Monbiot's argument the corporate takeover has already taken place. If this is so why would the corporations and their politicians want to introduce these reforms? And it should be noted that nothing is mentioned in his book about the working class and their exploitation. There is no general criticism of capitalism. Commodity production and exchange for profit are taken for granted as well as the labour market and the buying, selling and exploitation of labour power. Like all social reformers, Monbiot wants capitalism without the effects of capitalism.

What of any alternative to capitalism? Monbiot rules any alternative social system out of court:

*"Nor is there a political system which, if we were to embrace it, would solve all our problems. There is no Utopia, no perfect state. Political arrival is the prerequisite of tyranny, as the architects of heaven always end up designing a hell. Rather, democracy is sustained not by the system which prescribes it, whatever that might be, but by the challenges to that system. A political system is only as good as the capacity of its critics to attack it. They are the people who enforce the checks and balances which prevent any faction - the corporations, the aristocracy, the armed forces, even, for that matter, trade unions or environmental groups - from wielding excessive power" (p 357).*

Socialists don't claim to be able to make the world perfect; what we do claim is that the workers can establish a social system which can be run in the interests of all society. We agree there is no perfect State or Utopia but there is nothing Utopian about production just taking place to directly and freely feed, clothe and house people, ie not for profit but solely to satisfy people's needs - capitalist production has the potential to meet the needs of all society. However, the profit motive creates deliberate scarcity and unmet need. Capitalism holds back production from being developed in a rational and efficient manner for the benefit of all society.

And surely there is a problem with the social reformer who takes for granted a flawed system that needs to be sustained by perpetual reforms and political agitation? What a waste of time. Surely a better assessment of a flawed social system is to say that it has long since served its historical usefulness and that it should be replaced by a social system which does serve the needs of all society.

In short the poverty of Monbiot's book is his captive mind, a mind that cannot think outside its capitalist skin. He is forced to enjoin with the most reactionary conservative and chant out that *"we live in the best of all possible worlds"*.



And how is this perpetual reform movement to engage politically with "the system"? Monbiot suggests various forms of "legitimate protest" (p 358). These include: "parliamentary opposition", "lobbying by constituents and pressure groups", "campaigning journalism" and "adamantly non-violent direct action". There is to be no socialist politics, no socialist alternative. The book championed by what is left of the capitalist Left only demonstrates their utter political bankruptcy. The most Monbiot will campaign for is to "put the demo back into democracy" (p 358).

We have, of course, been here before. The entire 20th century was a time of social reform rather than Socialist revolution. As this article is being written countries are in economic depression, there is mass unemployment, war, millions starving for lack of food yet whole rain forests' worth of paper has been consumed enacting this or that reform to little or no effect. Now Monbiot and his chums at **The Guardian** want more social and political reforms. The politics of **The Guardian** and its journalists is like wading through thick sludge.

The failure of reform movements to solve the problems facing the working class bears eloquent testimony to the soundness of our claim that, so long as capitalism is accepted by the workers as a necessity, it must be run in the interests of the capitalist class, and not of the workers. Monbiot's perpetual social reforms and political action merely sustain capitalism and do not address the fundamental issue of class ownership and control of the means of production which faces the working class.

Monbiot's call for perpetual reforms may be made with sincerity but the immediate need of our class is freedom from exploitation by capitalism whether it be State, corporate, private, large or small. Freedom can only be achieved through the establishment of Socialism. As a consequence, the

workers' interests under capitalism are opposed to those of all sections of the capitalist class. Whether bankers or industrialists, landlords or commercial magnates, all capitalists participate in the process and the reward of class exploitation.

For Socialists political action to establish Socialism can only come from one group in society, the working class. Not any political action but conscious political action focussed on the one object which the capitalist class and their agents fear most; common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

### Obituary for Ted Edge

We are sorry to report the death of Edward (Ted) Edge who died on 11th January 2002 at the age of 72.

Ted joined the Party in the early 1950's and became a member of the then active Ealing Branch, supporting outdoor meetings at Ealing Green and canvassing the Socialist Standard. He was meticulous in the lectures he gave and the articles he wrote, doing the necessary research that made his contributions so worthwhile. For a time he also served on the Propaganda Committee at Head Office.

He resigned from the Clapham party in 1993 and joined us, soon contributing articles for Socialist Studies. His main activity of recent years, despite ill health, was to act as 'our man in the North'. With a stock of literature kept at his home, he, along with other members from London would attend Labour Party and Trade Union Conferences in Blackpool, distributing leaflets and selling our wide range of pamphlets with good results.

Outside of politics he enjoyed a deep interest in and knowledge of cricket and for some unknown reason at least to us, was an expert on all aspects of American baseball.

We shall miss him and his efforts for the socialist cause. To his wife and other family members we offer our condolences. Yet another voice for a better way of living has been silenced.

## LIBERATION FOR WHOM?

A number of capitalists and their tame academics, describing themselves as "*libertarians*", appear to believe that they can have capitalism with either a minimal state or no state at all. The greatest number of these market anarchists are in the US, for example the Libertarian Party, the Cato Foundation, the von Mises Foundation and the academic followers of Robert Nozick (author of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* 1974).

The modern capitalist state, as Socialists have always argued, is effectively the executive committee of the capitalist class. It is an instrument used by the capitalists to defend their interests against external enemies (rival capitalist states) and internal enemies (chiefly the native working class). Most capitalists, while grumbling at the level of taxation, are prepared to cough up in order that the state may continue to defend its interests. The libertarians see things differently. They regard the state as a usurper and taxation as theft, expecting only to pay for defence.

A book by J C Lester, "*Escape from Leviathan*" (Macmillan, 2000), gives an insight into the thinking of an extreme libertarian. He goes further than most in believing that war is not an inevitable consequence of capitalist competition, but rather that nationalism is a "*state propaganda tool*" (p 198) and that allowing complete market freedom will eliminate these conflicts so that even defence expenditure becomes unnecessary.

He kicks off by giving his opinion that the only thing seriously wrong with the world is politics, which he defines as "*all ... and only what involves the state*". By the state he means "*an organisation that coercively imposes ultimate control on some persons and property*" (p 1). Here, the last word, property, is clearly the most significant. For Socialists the only political aim is the replacement of capitalism by Socialism. What has Lester to say to us on this central issue? In criticising Karl Popper's concept of democracy he says: "*I am*



only interested in what I call 'actually existing democracy' rather than some impossible ideal (just as people used to refer to 'actually existing Socialism' - meaning regimes calling themselves Socialists - rather than some impossible ideal of Socialism)" (p 138).

Lester is saying that anything more democratic than the current anaemic political system today, let alone Socialism as we in the SPGB envisage it, is no more than an impossible pipe dream. But isn't that a bit like the kettle calling the pot black? We could say that we have no interest in his ideas because they are an impossible pipedream bearing no resemblance to "*actually existing capitalism*". Socialists have always taken political ideas seriously.

Nevertheless, Mr Lester would in any case be virulently opposed to Socialism even if he did believe it to be feasible. He does not want any form of democracy. He defines liberty as "*the absence of imposed cost*". In his view "*a democratic majority decision is seen as the cost imposed on a minority, the 'tyranny of the majority'*". That, of course, is a weasel phrase heard only too frequently from some defenders of capitalism who understand that capitalism only exists on the basis of the support given by a non-socialist working class.

Clearly this attitude implies massive elitism and contempt for "*the common mass*" (for which we can read the working class). Lester invokes Hardin's argument against common ownership (Garret Hardin "**The Tragedy of the Commons**", *Science* 162, 1968). This "*tragedy*" is said to occur " ... *when no one has any private property rights with respect to some potential resource. This means that no one has a personal incentive to produce, conserve or develop it because others can simply take the benefits. On the contrary, everyone has an incentive destructively to consume it before others do the same*".

This statement is nothing but a massive insult, not just to the present day working class, but also to the whole history of mankind. For most of human history, common ownership prevailed. Professor Andrew Whiten, an anthropological psychologist from St Andrew's University has argued that human beings were able to overcome predators such as big cats and wolves only by adopting primitive communistic values. All members of the prehistoric tribe were considered equal, he said, and food and clothing were equally shared (*The Times*, 18 August 2000).

Lester is assuming that everyone is as infected with the bourgeois ideology of private property rights as the libertarians: if this is the case we might see the behaviour he and Hardin expect. It was the rupture and violence of primitive capitalism with the peasants being driven off the land that parcelled up land into so much private property. The hunter gatherers of the Kalahari Desert have a communal existence, which goes against the capitalist values of Lester. In fact, even today, despite the vandalism, greed and possessive individualism of capitalism, the working class is not guilty of destructively consuming lest others do the same. They have no interest in doing so. Their true interests lie elsewhere in recreating, at a higher level, on a worldwide scale, the egalitarian social basis of earlier more primitive communism.

Lester's book contains some very unpleasant proposals indeed. It is suggested that human organs for transplantation are in short supply because the coercive capitalist state will not allow healthy workers to sell their organs for this purpose. We can imagine in Mr Lester's dystopia nurseries full of children bred and harvested for their organs. Similarly, the level of homelessness can, so we are told, be reduced if only the coercive state would relax standards to increase the amount of affordable housing available to those of limited means.

It will be perfectly clear from the foregoing that the libertarians offer nothing to the working class. If anything, they are aiming at an extreme, unrestrained form of capitalism. They glory in its inequalities and regard any attempt at

redistributive reform as counterproductive and unlibertarian. They see the "evil coercive state" against which they rage as restraining their pecuniary impulses; ironically this perception has some justification since one of the roles of the capitalist state, although a minor one, is to save individual capitalists from themselves and each other.

The arguments for and against the libertarians are for the capitalist class alone to consider; it is a mistake for workers to get involved in these purely capitalist matters just as it is a mistake for misinformed workers to take sides in capitalist wars.

Nevertheless, though still very much in a minority, the libertarian ideas do appear to be gaining ground. Why, at this stage of capitalist development, should this be so? One reason is the question of taxation. Libertarian ideas were useful to a section of the capitalist class to break Keynesianism and welfare state economics. Another reason is that these ideas were used to oppose the ideas of those who supported strong nationalisation or state capitalism during the cold war. To a certain extent libertarian ideology is a set of ruling class ideas that has filled the vacuum since the early 90's with the collapse of the Soviet Union and attempts by governments to reduce state economic activity.

This attempted reduction in state economic activity is however counterbalanced by the state's increased role as a repressive agent, reflected in anti-trade union legislation and by the big increase in both the prison population in the US and the UK. *Libertarians* would prefer this repression to be effected by the private sector, through private police forces and private prisons, but they are not opposed to increased oppression, regarding the state apparatus as inefficient in meeting out "justice".

In reality these defenders of capitalism are anti-libertarians. They do not want freedom from class exploitation and class privilege. It is ironic too that the most rabid defenders of capitalism are also, themselves, members of the working class.



## Obituary for Louis Cox

Another of our members - Louis Cox - died last autumn. He joined the Party in 1941 and along with others formed the old Dartford Branch. They were very active in their own area with indoor lectures and outdoor meetings in Central Park. The Branch were also responsible for the very successful outdoor meetings the Party ran in Beresford Square, Woolwich. On Thursday lunch-time (Market Day) and Sunday evenings we would draw large crowds that included many members of the armed forces from the nearby Woolwich barracks.

Eventually transferring to Camden (Bloomsbury) Branch, Louis was one of the members expelled by Clapham and he subsequently joined the reconstituted SPGB. Unfortunately, ill-health limited his activities, but from his home near Rochester, he kept up regular correspondence with the local press with some letters published. His endeavours to get us time on Meridian Radio failed, but he made sure that the local Labour Party and Green Party knew of our existence. That they ignored his challenge to debate evoked a response not fit to print. A machinist by trade (as were most of the Dartford members) he made sure that his Trade Union, the A.E.U. received regular copies of our journal.

He was a rather unique character and a bitter blow for him was the death of his wife, only a few months ago.

## LECTURE SERIES 2002

Sunday 24th March

1900 SOCIALIST IDEAS 2000 Speakers: D. Davies & T. D'Arcey

Sunday 14th April

THE FUTILITY OF REFORMISM Speakers: P. George & C. May

Meetings commence at 3 p.m.

## 10th SUMMER SCHOOL 2002

Sunday 16th JUNE

### WHERE IS CAPITALISM GOING ?

- . . . . Globalisation
- . . . Population
- . . Natural Resources
- . Socialism's Future

Sessions will commence at 12 noon and 2.30 p.m.

Light Buffet Luncheon 1.30 - 2.30 p.m.

All meetings at Marchmont Community Centre  
62 Marchmont Street, London WC1. (5 mins. Russell Square Tube Station)  
Question and Discussion period. Admission Free.